



PALM SPRINGS

SENTINEL

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Letter from the Fire Chief

Dear Neighbor:

When a fire starts in Palm Springs, most likely within its 28-square-mile urban area, the Palm Springs Fire Department's goal is an immediate, full-force response that keeps a small fire from becoming a major conflagration.

The department will be challenged to achieve that goal if it becomes necessary to implement the Contingency Budget Plan approved by the City Council in September. And that could happen if voters on November 2 fail to pass a temporary increase in the Utility User's Tax.

Palm Springs has a fire suppression force of 56 trained individuals. Last year, the Fire Department dispatched equipment and personnel on 6,500 calls. The Contingency Budget Plan would reduce that number by six, and also eliminate the Reserve Firefighter program, which provides nine on-call firefighters. Additionally, the department would institute a rotating fire station closure system that will shut down one of the city's five primary stations for a 24-hour period.

Closing a station reduces the number of on-duty city fire fighters from 14 to 12, or one engine company. The department's response may be slower, which could result in fire and rescue operations that are, at times, defensive in nature, rather than offensive. It also means relying more on mutual aid resources and off-duty firefighters—an overtime cost issue.

The Contingency Budget cuts could impact insurance premiums paid by business owners. If the staff cuts and station closures cause the City's ISO (Insurance Services Office) rating to increase from its current Class 3 to Class 4 or 5, insurance rates could increase for commercial buildings. The City is scheduled to be graded in December.

If residents fail to pass Measure V on November 2, there will be noticeable changes in the Fire Department. Residents will notice a reduction in fire inspections and public education programs. Moreover, a reduction in staff could increase the department's response time and limit our ability to respond to simultaneous emergencies.

As your Fire Chief, I want to reassure you that regardless of what happens on November 2, your Fire Department is committed to serving the community.

Sincerely yours,

Blake Goetz, Fire Chief

PUBLIC SAFETY: MEASURE V vs. THE CONTINGENCY BUDGET

In the City of Palm Springs, most residents place a high value on public safety programs. The community's quality of life is enhanced greatly because the Police Department and Fire Department have dedicated, highly-trained personnel equipped to respond quickly and competently to incidents large or small.

The dedication and the training of our public safety personnel will not change if Measure V fails on November 2, and the city implements the City Council-approved Contingency Budget Plan. However, response times may increase, and in some minor cases residents may have to go to the Police Department to file a report.

The Contingency Budget Plan reduces staff and programs in every city department. Fire Chief Blake Goetz' roster of 56 fire suppression personnel will be reduced by six. The nine-person Reserve Firefighter Program will also be eliminated.

Police Chief Gary Jeandron is proud of his "full-service" department. The department has a complement of 92 sworn and 56 classified personnel at full strength. However, the Contingency Budget Plan proposes a reduction of 10 positions (eight police officers, two community service officers), and this will have an impact on policing in the city.

Both Jeandron and Goetz say reaction times

will be greater. With a 24-hour rotating closure of the five main fire stations, distances will increase and equipment and personnel may not be on-scene as quickly. There will be great reliance on mutual aid resources from other cities and off-duty firefighter recalls.

Fewer police officers may limit the department's ability to respond to misdemeanor crimes, minor traffic accidents and many narcotics violations. Officers will be less involved in Neighborhood Watch and in meetings of MainStreet, Uptown, and neighborhood associations.

The reduction in force also means police officers rather than community service officers will have to do more reports. And more time on reports means less time in the community.

The alternative to the Contingency Budget Plan is Measure V. On November 2, Presidential Election voters will have the opportunity to impose an additional monthly tax surcharge of approximately \$7.20 in lieu of budget cuts. Measure V increases the Utility User's Tax (UUT), which is applied to home use of electricity, natural gas and intrastate telephone services, from five to eight percent. The increase would be limited to three years and once it expires, the UUT rate will revert to five percent.

ISSUES AT A GLANCE

MEASURE V Increase Utility User's Tax from 5% to 8% for three years	CONTINGENCY BUDGET PLAN To be implemented if Measure V does not pass
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintain current number of police officers• Maintain current number of firefighters• Keep all fire stations open full-time	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eliminate 10 police officers• Eliminate six firefighters• Close fire stations on a rotating basis• Reduce library hours of operation• Reduce community center hours of operation• Stop steam cleaning of Downtown sidewalks• Stop afternoon trash pickup Downtown

MEASURE V: A WAY TO MAINTAIN CURRENT SERVICES

Sometimes there are no easy answers in the midst of the complexities of creating or revising a budget, whether it is a city or a family spending plan. But Measure V, which will institute a temporary increase in the city's Utility User's Tax (UUT), is a possible answer to solving the City's budget shortfall.

That increase will amount to about \$7.20 a month on a household's electricity, natural gas and intrastate telephone services. The surcharge would first show up on utility bills sent out in February 2005. The surcharge would remain in effect for three years. At that point, city officials believe that additional cost savings and

improvements in the economy will offset the need for the additional revenue generated by Measure V.

The city's finance director says the UUT currently generates \$5.8 million, or 13 percent of the city's General Fund budget. The UUT increase would generate an additional \$3.5 million in revenue per year.

Much like revising a household budget when the price of a gallon of gas increases or food prices go up, the city budget needs additional revenue to make up for a shortfall caused by rising costs. Unlike most family spending plans, the city's budget shortfall can also be traced, in large part,

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